



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

[www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)

[marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)

Issue # 72

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*The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.*

*Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.*

## MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2016-2018

Steve Vagnozzi	Chair
Open	Vice-Chair
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John Langdon	Gov'l/Public Affairs Coordinator
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Open	West Region Chair
Open	East/Central Region Chair

*The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak*  
*ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase*

## 2017 MEETINGS

**14 January** – REO Town Depot (former Grand Trunk Depot), Lansing

**18 February** – 1<sup>st</sup> Methodist Church, Kalamazoo

**18 March** – Clinton Northern Railway Museum, St. Johns

**22 April** – Grand Trunk Pub, Detroit

**13 May** – Chicago Union Station

**10 June** – Executive Committee

**15 July** – Traverse City

**19 August** – Bangor

**23 September** – Durand Union Station

**October** – tentative Grand Rapids

**November** – tentative Annual Meeting

**December** – Executive Committee

Visit [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)  
Email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)

## Customer Advisory Council Seeking Volunteers

*By Carolyn Stagger Cokley*

I celebrated my one-year anniversary as a member of the NARP staff, and as Director of the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee (ACAC) on August 1. This past year has given me a keen understanding of the importance of customer feedback, the role the ACAC plays in representing the voice of the passenger and how this voice can work to enhance the passenger experience, engage employees and advance the Amtrak mission and goals. I continue to be impressed with the enthusiasm of ACAC members who strive to provide Amtrak with the most straightforward and constructive feedback they can. To that end, the recruitment of conscientious, reliable and enthusiastic passengers is primary.

The **Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee** (ACAC) is a volunteer organization established in 1997 to represent the traveling public and provide Amtrak with the "voice of the customer." Committee members are frequent Amtrak riders who commute within their specific region of the country and/or regularly travel across the country several times a year.

The committee consists of 20 - 30 volunteers from across the United States who represent Amtrak's ridership and service areas. The ACAC is a diverse and inclusive group with respect to race, gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, location and experience. Riders with disabilities and college students also serve as members of the committee. Committee members travel at their own expense and offer valuable feedback, comments and suggestions on every step of the Amtrak journey. Whether the topic is service, equipment, stations or management, the ACAC is structured to give timely feedback.

Committee meetings/business are primarily conducted through frequent e-mail correspondence and teleconference calls. Members also come together nationally to collaborate with Amtrak management on customer related issues. Members are required to submit Trip Reports via a mobile app that feeds directly to Amtrak for review.

The committee continuously recruits members to fill its ranks. Currently,

*(ACAC continues on page 2)*



### MARP Member Meeting

**Saturday, September 23**

**9:30 am – Noon**

**Durand Union Station**

200 Railroad Street, Durand MI 48429

**Map & Directions**

MARP will hold a regular monthly membership meeting at Durand Union Station on September 23. Socializing at 9:30, program at 10:00. The Annual Meeting, originally scheduled for this date has been tentatively rescheduled for November. See website [marp.org](http://marp.org). Or send email to [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com).

## MARP Visits Bangor

A small group of MARP members and friends gathered on 19 August in the Odd Fellows Hall situated above the **Bangor Historical Society Museum** in the historic Funk, Steinman & Ely Building in downtown Bangor. The Museum features a collection of **Kalamazoo Toy Trains** which were manufactured in the Bangor train station during the years prior to restoration of passenger service in 1984.

Ron Pesch, author of "Big Wheels Turning: Greyhound in Michigan", lived up to his billing as an engaging speaker, unfolding a captivating story of how several small, highly motivated and fiercely competitive "Mom" and "Pop" passenger services in West Michigan and Wisconsin eventually coalesced into the nationwide Greyhound intercity bus system. It was interesting to learn that the familiar image of the sleek racing dog appeared on their vehicles long before "Greyhound" became the official name of the company.

Following the meeting Ken Ratzlaff, a prime mover in restoration of the **Bangor Train Station**, and Elizabeth Green, owner of the **cafe** located in the depot, gave MARP member JP DesCamp and guest Ken Meyer, a tour of the depot and a look at the platform restoration work now about 1/3 complete.

## Victory! Anti-Amtrak Amendments Fail

Thanks to the efforts of NARP and your calls to Congress, there is good news to report. Taking a strong stance in support of the national rail network, a bipartisan coalition of transportation leaders in the House rallied to defeat two damaging amendments and again turn back the Administration's proposal to end long-distance train service.

## Midwest Rail Plan Workshop

The forty-three member Stakeholder Planning Group will convene in Detroit for the third of four planned workshops on Wednesday, September 13, from 9AM to 4PM EDT. You are invited once again to listen in remotely to the workshop. If you are interested in doing so, email [kate.beazley@quetica.com](mailto:kate.beazley@quetica.com).



Information and Documents Available at  
**[MidWestRail.org](http://MidWestRail.org)**

## QLINE by the Numbers

- Ridership has increased from 4,000 daily riders in June to 5,500 during August
- Wait times have decreased 15% since May
- Ridership is highest between 11 AM and 4 PM, Mon-Sat
- A day pass with unlimited rides costs \$3.00

*(ACAC continued from page 1)*

**volunteers are needed particularly on underrepresented State Supported routes within the State of Michigan.** In addition, we are actively recruiting members who ride the following routes:

- The Northeast Corridor
- The Heartland Flyer
- The Vermonter and the Ethan Allen

If you are interested in joining the team, here are a few more details. Membership terms run for three years with a two-term, six year maximum. We welcome new members on the **Long Distance Subcommittee** who (in the year prior to joining) have taken at least six, one-way trips on Amtrak long distance routes. Each trip must be at least 300 miles each way. We welcome new members on the **Northeast Corridor Subcommittee** and **State Supported Services Subcommittee** who (in the year prior to joining) have taken at least ten, one-way trips on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor or on State Supported routes. Each trip must be at least 45 miles each way. Members may also participate on the **Senior and Disabilities Task Force**. Most members easily exceed this minimum annual travel requirement and must maintain the same level of travel once selected for the committee. Members complete trip reports using a mobile app downloaded on their smart phone or tablet.

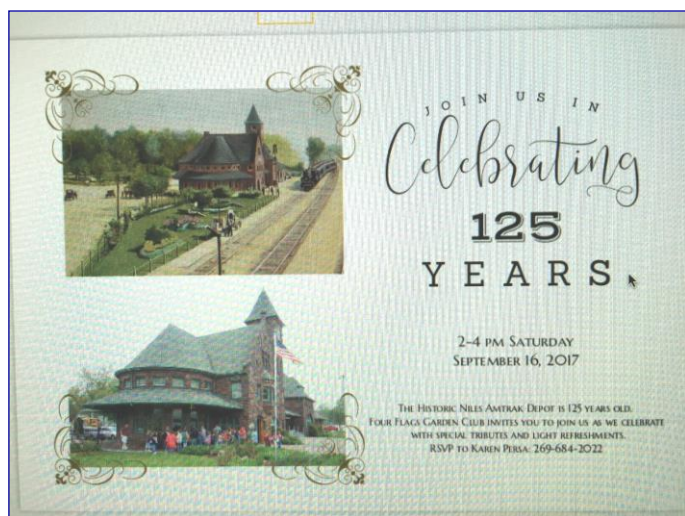
If you are interested in serving with the Committee, please forward the following information to [ACAC@amtrak.com](mailto:ACAC@amtrak.com):

1. A letter of interest explaining how your travel, customer, educational and professional experiences can benefit Amtrak and the committee's work.
2. Current resume
3. A list of all the Amtrak trips that you have taken during the past 12 months.
4. A list of all planned Amtrak trips for the next 12 months.

Amtrak and NARP employees, board members and their immediate family members (spouse, domestic partner, children, parents and siblings) are not eligible to serve on the committee, as well as immediate family members of current and former ACAC members.

For more information about ACAC, contact me directly at [ccokley@narprail.org](mailto:ccokley@narprail.org). Passengers with comments about Amtrak service, policies or other matters should e-mail Amtrak directly or call 1-800-USA-RAIL (1-800-872-7245) and ask to speak with a Customer Relations representative.

*Carolyn Cokely is Director of the Customer Advisory Program, National Association of Railroad Passengers.*



## Niles Depot Celebrates a Birthday

The Four Flags Garden Club is hosting a community celebration on Saturday, September 16<sup>th</sup> from 2:00 – 4:00 pm at the Depot. The open house will feature displays in the station, local speakers and refreshments.

The Four Flags Garden Club, carrying on the tradition begun by John Gipner early in the station's history, maintains the beautiful landscaping around the depot. Each year, the Garden Club also puts on a Hometown Christmas Celebration, scheduled this year for Saturday, December 2.

The original gardens and greenhouse supplied fresh flowers for the dining room in the station as well as for the dining cars on the Michigan Central trains. The station, designed by

architects Frederich Spier and William C. Rohns, opened in time to welcome passengers bound for the 1892 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and on the Michigan State Register in 1992. The station is owned by Amtrak. Make plans now for a pleasant day trip to Niles to join the birthday celebration. Book your tickets at [amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com). Take the kids along **with a 50% discount**.

## Chasing the Great American Eclipse by Train

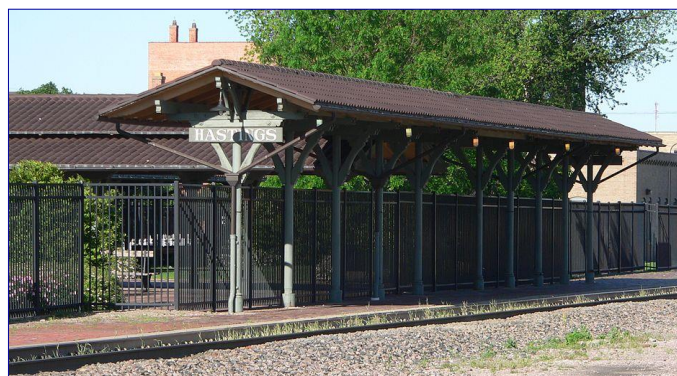
by Kay Chase

No, the train didn't travel fast enough to follow the eclipse across the country. But a number of locations lying within the 70-mile wide band of totality across the country are served by Amtrak trains and I was one of many people who took advantage of that. In fact, when boarding the train in Kalamazoo, bound for Hastings, Nebraska, I was delighted to find fellow MARP members Marti and Warren Fritz bound for Osceola, Iowa, where they would join friends and drive to a prime viewing location in Missouri.

We could have taken the *Illini* or the *Saluki* to Carbondale, Illinois. Or we might have opted for the *Eclipse Express* train that Amtrak, the State of Illinois and CN Railway put together to take folks in style to the sold-out festivities at the 15,000 seat Saluki Stadium in Carbondale. Those train tickets sold out within 22 hours.

Marti and Warren traveled to Iowa to experience the eclipse with long-time friends living there. I went to Nebraska in search of a place where I could witness the event without the crowds and hoopla. I was rewarded with a truly memorable experience. And the eclipse was not the only notable aspect of this foray into "fly over" country. As always, in places not often thought of as "destinations", I stumble on surprising, enlightening and intriguing people, places and landscapes. In **Hastings** I found the **Back Alley Bakery** with unbelievable breads, delicious lunches and excellent artwork; **upscale eateries**; **an independent book store (!)**; the amazing **Museum of Natural & Cultural History** (the largest municipal museum between Chicago and Denver); **Lake Hastings Park** for picnicking, swimming and fishing; the nearby **Platte River** for boating; prairie, birds and buffalo at the **Crane Trust Visitor & Nature Center**. Hotel accommodations are plentiful and camping is available in nearby state recreation areas. Mr. Joel Kershner at the eponymously named Kershner's Auto Corner makes it easy to rent a car for your explorations.

I am already making plans for the Great American Eclipse of 2024. That event will move across the U.S. from the Southwest to New England. Oddly, the location with the longest period of totality will again be Southern Illinois. Are you listening Amtrak?



The Amtrak station in Hastings, Nebraska, may be one of the most pleasant places in the country to wait for a train on a balmy summer evening. At the end of Eclipse Day, there were some 60 people gathered on the covered patio, surrounded by trees, shrubs and flowers, and chatting about the experiences of the day. The westbound *California Zephyr* arrived first and most of the flock boarded, many returning to the Denver area. Soon the whistle of the approaching eastbound was heard and the rest of us were on our way.

***Did you have a memorable train trip this summer? We'd like to hear about it.***

***You can send your story to us at [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com).***



## View from elsewhere . . .

*"I'm passionate about building strong businesses that create the best travel experience possible for customers."*

-- New Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson in a prepared statement when accepting the position.

*"To new CEO Richard Anderson we say, 'Pay attention to what is going on in flyover country. These passengers are your real bread and butter, so DON'T write us off and think all that matters is what happens in the Northeast despite what those politicians tell you. If you want to know more about us, or even if you don't, come talk to us out here. We want the trains and we want them to be reliable, clean, and staffed by people who know what to do and how to make all your customers feel that they are valuable and should come back again. Too much to ask?'"*

-- Russ Jackson guest commentary published in **Texas Rail Advocates News**. In this thought-provoking article, Jackson challenges the new CEO to look beyond the rhetoric of Amtrak opponents who repeat the mantra of NEC profits and long-distance losses. He points out that page *ii* of **Amtrak's 2018 Budget Request** states that "eliminating long distance services would result in an additional cost of approximately \$423 million in FY 2018 alone."



Chuck Merckel took this photo when he and Jeanie arrived at the Dearborn station on 20 August to restock the information table. Inquiring about the locked station, Chuck learned that MDOT Office of Rail is "aware of this situation and working to remedy it."



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MARP, INC  
PO BOX 1368  
Okemos, MI 48805-1368

## Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard  
202-224-3121

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**Sen. Gary Peters**

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